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Gaelic-medium primary education in Scotland: towards a new taxonomy?

Fiona O'Hanlon

Since 1985, the term 'Gaelic-medium education' has been widely employed in policy, curriculum guidelines and research connected with the Scottish Gaelic primary education sector. This paper will investigate the extent to which existing taxonomies of Gaelic-medium education represent and effectively categorise the heterogeneity of linguistic practice which marks Gaelic-medium primary education in Scotland. Key variables of 'linguistic practice' include the percentage of teaching time delivered through Gaelic and English, and the subjects taught through the medium of Gaelic and English, at various primary school stages.

The first part of the paper will outline such published definitions and categorisations of the concept of Gaelic-medium primary education in Scotland. The second section will consider the effectiveness of existing taxonomies for the categorisation of current educational practice. Questionnaire data obtained from 27 'Gaelic-medium' primary schools during May and June 2005 (O'Hanlon, 2005) will be presented as evidence of the variation which currently marks primary level Scottish Gaelic-medium education. Collated data concerning which language (Gaelic or English) is used to teach each of six key areas of the primary curriculum at different primary stages will be used as the key illustration of this variation.

The last section of the paper will consider the potential benefits of the development of a new taxonomy for Gaelic-medium education, and will outline a proposed classificatory model from the Welsh context, from which Scotland may potentially learn.

Although Gaelic has been used as a medium of instruction in Scottish schools for centuries, the term ‘Gaelic-medium education’ has only existed since 1985, following the establishment of the first Gaelic-medium primary units in Glasgow and Inverness. The key educational and linguistic tenets of the Gaelic-medium education model will be outlined in Section 1, but it seems pertinent to, first, briefly outline the educational developments which preceded the Gaelic-medium model, in order that the influences upon the system be better understood.

The Western Isles’ ‘Bilingual’ Education Project, launched in 1975, was an educational initiative which aimed to make ‘*Gaelic speaking children...as literate and fluent in Gaelic as in English when transferring from primary to secondary education*’ (CNE, 1982, Para 3.3). The linguistic approach adopted to achieve such an aim involved school pupils being taught bilingually from the outset of their education: ‘in their first years at primary school, Gaelic speaking children will be taught to speak, read and write both Gaelic and English so that they will be able to use both languages as a means of learning’ (ibid., Para 3.3). The bilingual project’s perceived success prompted Comhairle nan Eilean to make bilingual education the official language model through which primary level teaching and learning would occur in Western Isles’ schools from 1981.

A parallel development in Gaelic education was the establishment in 1982 of Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Àraich (CNSA), a Gaelic-medium pre-school organisation which emphasised that: ‘All children and their parents are welcome to join any CNSA pre-school group *whether or not they speak Gaelic*’ (CNSA, 2006). CNSA’s provision of pre-school education through the medium of Gaelic fostered demand for Gaelic-medium primary education from Gaelic speakers and non-Gaelic speakers alike. The new Gaelic-medium primary units were able to accommodate such a linguistically varied pupil intake due to the initial Gaelic immersion phase which marks the ‘Gaelic-medium’ linguistic approach, in which Gaelic is used as the language of teaching and learning for the first two years of the primary school curriculum.

The Gaelic-medium education sector expanded rapidly alongside the growth in popularity of Comhairle nan Sgoiltean Àraich, and, at its peak, new Gaelic-medium education units in primary schools were being established at an average rate of six per year between 1989 and 1993 (MacLeod, 2003, pp. 5-6). In 1996, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar pledged to ‘make provision for Gaelic-medium Primary education on an experimental basis with a view to future development’ (CNES, 1996, p. 9). However, such an expansion of ‘Gaelic-medium’ education provision did not result in uniformity of approach with regard to teaching in Gaelic and English at primary school level. Rather, the term ‘Gaelic-medium education’ came to encompass a wide variety of Gaelic-English language models¹, which differed in response to factors such as Local Authority policy, the amount of Gaelic spoken in the surrounding area, and the linguistic background of the school’s pupil intake.

What defines ‘Gaelic-medium Primary Education’?

The term ‘Gaelic-medium education’ has been widely incorporated into policy, Curriculum Guidelines and research since 1985. This section will first outline the key features of Gaelic-medium education identified by the *National Guidelines for Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: Gaelic 5-14* (SOED, 1993) and will then analyze existing research on models of language learning and teaching within the Scottish Gaelic-medium education sector.

Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland National Guidelines: *Gaelic 5-14*

Gaelic-medium education is primarily defined in relation to ‘the initial [Gaelic] immersion phase of at least two years’ duration’ (ibid., p. 25), which the Gaelic 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines deem to be the ‘most important’ (SOED, 1993, p. 25) common feature of Gaelic-medium primary education. The exact length of this immersion phase - which focuses on the development of ‘oral competence’ in Gaelic (ibid., p. 7) - is not specified, but the guidelines deem that ‘in general, English should not be introduced until pupils have attained Level A targets in the four language outcomes in Gaelic’ (ibid., p. 6). As the *Assessment 5-14 Guidelines* state that the four language outcomes of Listening, Talking, Reading and Writing for Level A ‘should be attainable in the course of Primary 1- Primary 3 by almost all pupils’ (SOED, 1991, p. 7), the initial Gaelic immersion period tends to be between two and three years’ duration in practice. The 5-14 Gaelic Guidelines also emphasise that ‘Gaelic should be the predominant teaching medium throughout the primary stages’ (SOED, p. 1993, p. 6). The proportion of teaching time

that should be taught through the medium of Gaelic at each primary stage is not specified, however, as it is expected that ‘the relative proportion of time allocated to Gaelic and English language will vary in accordance with the needs of the child at particular times’ (ibid., p. 6).

The Gaelic 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines thus provide key recommendations concerning the core content of Gaelic-medium language models, yet devolve responsibility for the development of specific primary school level Gaelic-English language models to individual schools. Primary schools which provide Gaelic-medium education are instructed to ‘produce a policy for language’ (ibid., p. 6) which will ‘bring pupils to the stage of broadly equal competence in Gaelic and English, in all the skills, by the end of Primary 7’ (ibid., p. 6). Such a system theoretically facilitates much variation with regard to Gaelic-English language models at a school level, a fact that the 5-14 Gaelic Guidelines acknowledge when they state that ‘practice in Gaelic medium schools varies, reflecting the range of language backgrounds as well as particular local circumstances and differing regional policies’ (ibid., p. 25).

Existing research into Gaelic-English language models in the Scottish context

The nature and range of such variation between primary school Gaelic-English language models was investigated by MacNeil in 1993 when 833 pupils were being taught in 39 Gaelic-medium units within five Scottish education authorities². MacNeil highlights that, following the initial two-year Gaelic immersion phase, ‘Gaelic can be used either for part or all of the curriculum; for specific subjects and not for others; for specific subjects on

an age-related basis; or across subjects, in conjunction with English use, usually on a time-share basis' (MacNeil, 1994, pp. 247-8) in Gaelic-medium primary education, and thus argues that 'Gaelic-medium education is an umbrella term' (ibid., p. 247). Such heterogeneity of policy is subsequently taxonomised by MacNeil into three key Gaelic-medium language models. The first model involves Gaelic-medium pupils being exposed to 'total [Gaelic] immersion' in a Gaelic-medium class throughout primary school, with English being taught through the medium of Gaelic. The second model is marked by a 'strongly Gaelic-dominant bilingual phase' after the initial two-year immersion period, with a 'gradual shift, still within the designated unit, towards greater English use, particularly in relation to Mathematics and Science,' as the pupils approach the end of their primary schooling. In the second model 'both English and Gaelic are used across subjects, usually ... Gaelic for three days of the week and English for the remaining two.' The third model involves Gaelic-medium pupils undertaking a two-year Gaelic immersion phase and subsequently 'merging with the rest of the school' (ibid., p. 248) which operates a Bilingual Education Policy.

However, although many subsequent research reports acknowledge the variety of language models employed in primary level Gaelic-medium education, the majority avoid directly addressing the issue. This is evidenced in Johnstone et al's research *The Attainments of Pupils Receiving Gaelic-medium Primary Education in Scotland* (1999) which aimed to ascertain whether the educational attainments of Gaelic-medium pupils 'matched national attainment targets' (Johnstone et al 1999, p. 1) in Gaelic, Mathematics and Environmental Studies at the Primary 3, Primary 5 and Primary 7 stages. However,

the project did not investigate the impact of variation between Gaelic-English language models upon educational attainment. Indeed, although Johnstone et al. acknowledge the heterogeneity of language models at the start of their report: ‘there are *different* models of Gaelic-medium education’ (ibid., p. 8) and highlight some features that distinguish these models: ‘in all models, English is fed in to some extent...but the models differ in the ways by which this is achieved’ (ibid., p. 8), the report subsequently minimises the significance of such heterogeneity by opting rather to emphasise the common principle of Gaelic-medium education, namely that Gaelic is ‘the main medium of teaching and learning from Primary 1 onwards’ (ibid., p. 8). Such a homogeneous conception of Gaelic-medium education permeates everything from the research question - ‘Do the attainments of pupils in Gaelic-medium primary education match national attainment targets in Gaelic at P3 and P5 and in Gaelic and English at P7?’ (ibid., p. 5) - to the conclusion that ‘children educated through the medium of Gaelic are not disadvantaged in comparison with their counterparts who are educated through the medium of English and that in the process they have gained the advantage of becoming bilingual and bicultural’ (ibid., p. 67).

The Scottish Executive report on *The Attainments of Pupils Receiving Gaelic-medium Primary Education in Scotland* research (Johnstone et al. 2000) does provide further explanation concerning such models of Gaelic-English language learning and teaching, however: ‘In some schools there is an immersion phase for the first two to three years, followed by a Gaelic-dominant bilingual phase. In others, the emphasis shifts towards a greater use of English as the teaching medium in the last two years of primary school’

(ibid., p. 1). The report further highlights variation with regard to the linguistic medium through which English is taught: 'In some cases, English is taught through the medium of Gaelic; in others English is taught in English' (ibid., p. 1). However, although acknowledging such heterogeneity, the report does not posit the potential relationship between language model and educational attainment, nor does it categorise the range of language models employed in the Gaelic-medium education sector at the time of the research in 1999.

Moreover, research that does incorporate distinctions between the Gaelic-English language models employed within Gaelic-medium education is often limited in scope. MacLeod's *Historical Overview* of Gaelic education (MacLeod, 2003) details the language models used by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Highland, the two largest local authority providers of Gaelic-medium education, but does not outline the language models employed by the other local authorities providing Gaelic-medium education. MacLeod states: 'Highland and Western Isles represent the two ends of the spectrum ... schools in other areas are all somewhere on this spectrum' (MacLeod, 2003, p. 8). As a total of 14 local authorities made provision for Gaelic-medium primary education in 2003, MacLeod here omits to represent the Gaelic-English language models of some 12 local authorities.

The *Improving Achievement in Gaelic* report produced by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) in 2005 recommended that schools and local authorities 'build more effectively on successful early intervention and immersion strategies to ensure that

appropriately high expectations are set for all [Gaelic-medium] pupils' (HMIe, 2005, p. 38). However, the report does not subsequently exemplify an existing model of best practice regarding the use of Gaelic and English at the middle and upper primary school stages from which other educational stakeholders could learn. Rather, the report perpetuates the core Gaelic-English language model first outlined in *Gaelic 5-14* in 1993, which characterises Gaelic-medium language models by means of their common features: 'learning and teaching is initially wholly in Gaelic during the immersion phase from P1 to P3...Thereafter Gaelic continued to be the predominant teaching medium, although some teaching was also conducted in English' (ibid., p. 16).

Heterogeneity of linguistic practice: Gaelic-medium Primary Education 2004-2005

My MSc dissertation research (O'Hanlon, 2005) aimed to ascertain the extent of variation in Gaelic-English language models by means of an investigation of the variety of linguistic approaches employed to teach key aspects of the 5-14 curriculum across the primary school level Gaelic-medium sector in Scotland in the school year 2004-2005. Key aspects of variation included the duration of the initial Gaelic immersion phase, the extent to which English is used to teach the 'curriculum areas' (SEED, 2000, pp. 25-6) of Mathematics, Expressive Arts, Environmental Studies, Personal and Social Education, and Language (English and Gaelic) at the various primary school stages, and the percentage of teaching time conducted in Gaelic and in English at the Upper Primary stage (Primary 6 and Primary 7).

Questionnaires were formulated and distributed to the head teachers of all 61 Scottish primary schools with Gaelic-medium provision. 27 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 44%. The questionnaire sample represented 28% of Gaelic-medium (GM) provision in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, 63% of GM provision in Highland, and 47% of the GM provision in the other local authorities which provide Gaelic-medium education (GME).

The bar charts which follow each display data concerning the range and relative popularity of the linguistic approaches taken to the teaching of a key aspect of the Gaelic-medium primary school curriculum. The graphs illustrate such heterogeneity of practice both at a national level (that is to say, across the education authorities in the Gaelic-medium sector) and at a local authority level for those local authorities providing Gaelic-medium education who returned two or more questionnaires. Such variation of practice at a local authority level is displayed on the graphs by means of a patterning system which identifies the local authority of each school level respondent.

The education authorities of the six questionnaire respondents whose schools constitute the sole Gaelic-medium provision in their region are labelled LAs A-F (Local Authorities A to F) in order to preserve the anonymity of respondents.

Specific aspects of language models that exhibit heterogeneity

The duration of the initial Gaelic immersion

Figure 1:

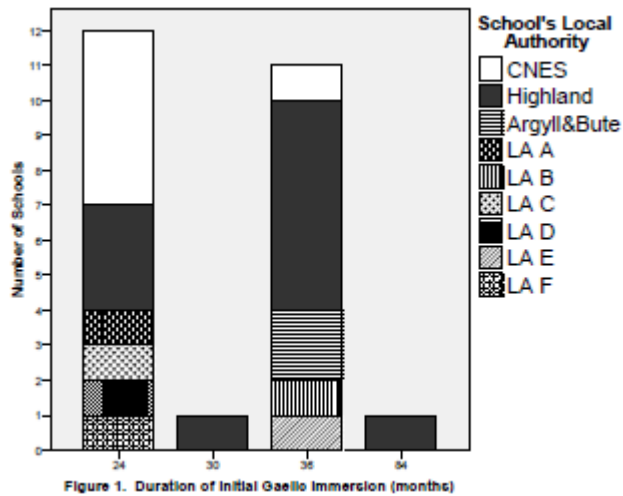


Figure 1 displays the questionnaire data concerning the duration of the initial Gaelic immersion phase in months for the 25 respondents who answered this question. Variation of practice at a national level is evident, as whilst 12 schools provide a 24 month initial Gaelic immersion period, 11 schools prefer to employ an initial Gaelic immersion period of 36 months duration. Two individual schools opt for a 30 month and an 84 month immersion period respectively.

The graph also shows the extent to which variation of practice exists within local authorities with regard to the length of the initial Gaelic immersion period. Highland Council displays the most internal heterogeneity with regard to this aspect, with 3 schools providing a 24 month immersion, 1 providing 30 months, 6 providing 36 months and one favouring an 84 month long immersion period in which everything, including English, is taught through Gaelic from Primary One to Seven. Five of the six respondents from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar reported that a 24 month initial Gaelic immersion was

employed in their schools, and both respondents from Argyll and Bute provided a 36 month long initial Gaelic immersion.

Which curriculum areas are taught through the medium of English, and at what primary stages?

The greatest degree of heterogeneity of practice with regard to the linguistic approaches adopted to the teaching of curricular areas was reported in relation to English, Mathematics and Expressive Arts, and thus these will be presented in this paper before consideration is given to Environmental Studies, Personal and Social Education and Gaelic.

Two of the schools which responded to my questionnaire are not represented in the following graphs as the schools solely had lower primary, and lower and middle-primary Gaelic-medium provision respectively at the time of my research (in the academic year 2004-2005). Thus, the maximum number of respondents represented in the graphs will be 25.

Figure 2:

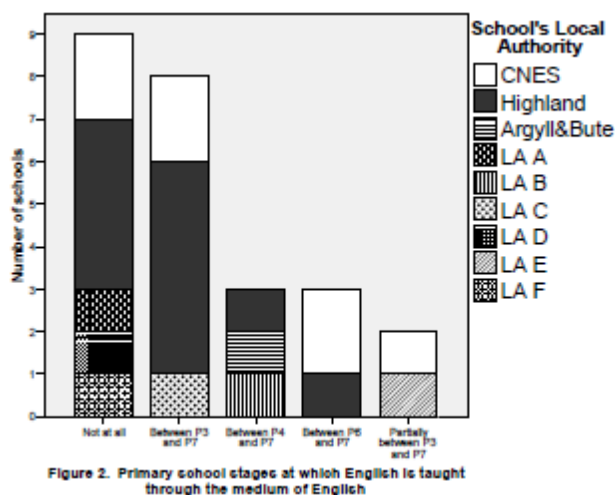


Figure 2 shows that the 25 primary school Gaelic-medium education providers who responded to the questionnaire employ four different linguistic approaches to the teaching of English as a subject. The two principal approaches are teaching English through the medium of Gaelic at all primary school levels (employed by 9 out of 25 respondents' schools) and teaching English through English medium from its introduction in Primary 3 or 4 (depending on the length of the initial Gaelic immersion period) until Primary 7 (an approach employed in 11 respondents' schools). The second approach is represented by the second and third bars in the bar chart, but the two bars have not been collated into a single 'Between P3/4 and P7' column in order that the specific information concerning the primary school stage at which English is introduced as a subject be presented. Two additional models exist, one which teaches English through English at the upper primary (Primary 6 and 7) stage only (employed in 3 respondents' schools) and one which teaches English partially through Gaelic and partially through English between Primary 3 and Primary 7, an approach adopted by two respondents' schools.

The graph further depicts variation of practice within local authorities, with 6 of the 11 respondents from Highland Council teaching English through English from P3/4 to P7, 4 respondents teaching English solely through the medium of Gaelic, and one respondent teaching the subject through the medium of English at the upper primary stage only. The most heterogeneity is exemplified by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, however, whose schools variously employ all four models of English teaching.

Figure 3:

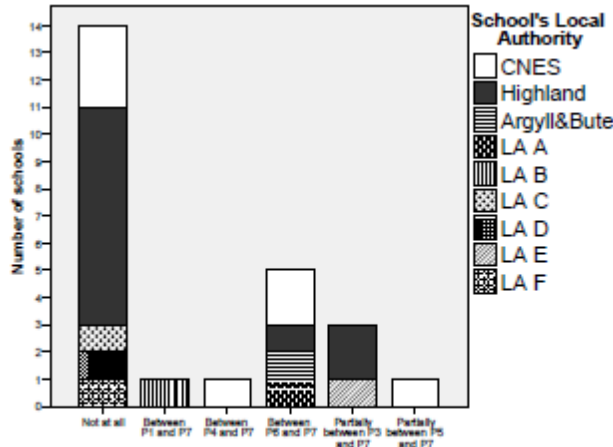


Figure 3. Primary school stages at which Maths is taught through the medium of English

Figure 3 displays the linguistic approaches used to teach Mathematics in the Gaelic-medium primary providers who responded to the questionnaire. The principal model, employed in 14 of 25 respondents' schools, involves teaching Mathematics through the medium of Gaelic from P1 to P7. The second most popular approach is to teach the subject through the medium of English in the upper primary stages (between P6 and P7), an approach adopted by five respondents' schools. Teaching Mathematics partially through Gaelic and partially through English between P3 and P7 is also relatively popular, employed by three respondents' schools. The remaining three models, namely

teaching Mathematics through English at all primary stages, through English between P4 and P7 and partially through English, partially through Gaelic between P5 and P7 are each used by one respondent's school.

Relative homogeneity of practice is exhibited by Highland Council with regard to the teaching of Mathematics, as 8 out of 11 respondents teach the subject solely through the medium of Gaelic, with 2 respondents teaching Mathematics partially through English between P3 and P7, and one using English at the upper primary stage only. Greater heterogeneity of approach is exhibited by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, whose schools employ four linguistic approaches in the teaching of Mathematics at primary school level.

Figure 4:

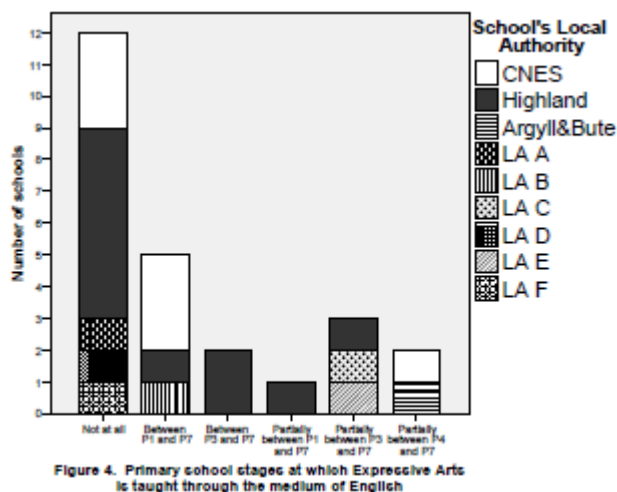


Figure 4 displays the linguistic approaches used to teach Expressive Arts in the Gaelic-medium primary providers who responded to the questionnaire. The key trend is to teach Expressive Arts solely through the medium of Gaelic, an approach employed by 12 of the 25 respondents' schools, whilst the secondary trend is to teach the subject through the

medium of English between P1 and P7, an approach adopted by 5 of the 25 respondents' schools. One respondent qualified their school's adherence to the wholly English medium model by noting that 'Pupils are exposed to English...when specialist teachers take classes in art, music and PE [Physical Education].' Three other models are evident - one which teaches Expressive Arts partially through the medium of English from P3 or P4 to P7 (5 respondents), one which provides the subject through the medium of English between P3 and P7 (2 respondents), and the final model uses English to teach Expressive Arts to some extent at all primary school stages.

Both Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Highland Council exhibit variation with regard to the approach taken to the teaching of Expressive Arts in their Gaelic providing primary schools, but the extent of the internal variation is much greater for Highland Council, as the graph shows its schools to employ all five language models here identified.

Figures 5 to 7 display the linguistic approaches employed to teach Environmental Studies, Personal and Social Education and Gaelic respectively in the Gaelic-medium primary providers who responded to the questionnaire.

Figure 5:

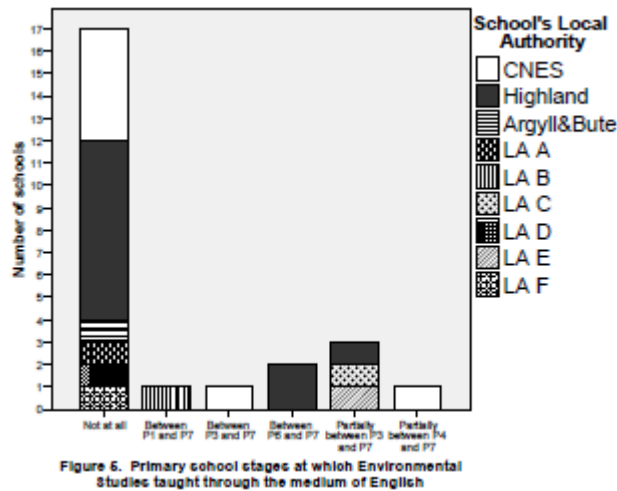


Figure 5 presents the linguistic approaches used to teach Environmental Studies in respondents' schools. Less variation is evident in the teaching of this subject than in Expressive Arts, however, as 17 of the 25 respondents teach Environmental Studies solely through the medium of Gaelic at all primary stages. The second most popular linguistic approach is to teach Environmental Studies partially through English medium between P3 or P4 and P7, a method employed by four respondents' schools. The third model is to teach Environmental Studies through the medium of English in the upper primary stage, an approach adopted by two respondents' schools in Highland Council. Two other approaches are displayed in the graph, each of which is employed by one respondent's school - the first teaches Environmental Studies through the medium of English from P1 to P7 and the second introduces English medium Environmental Studies in P3, after the Gaelic immersion phase.

Figure 6:

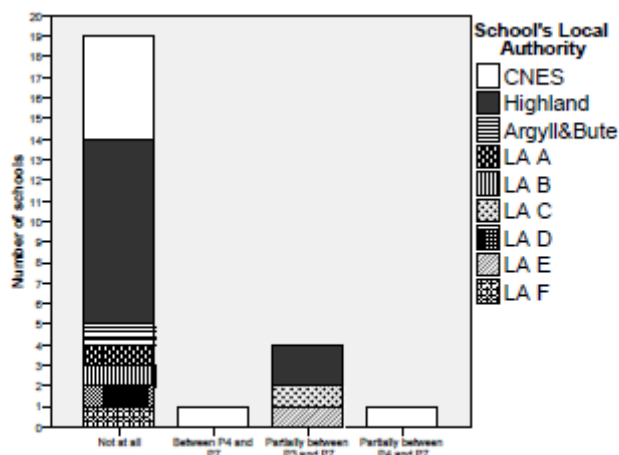


Figure 8. Primary school stages at which Personal and Social Education is taught through the medium of English

Figure 6 shows that 19 of the 25 respondents' schools teach Personal and Social Education (PSE) through the medium of Gaelic. The secondary trend is to teach PSE partially through the medium of English between P3 or P4 and P7, a method employed in five respondents' schools. One school explicated their 'partially between P3 and P7' response for Personal and Social Education by stating that 'Personal and Social Education [is] mainly taught through the medium of Gaelic but some parts are done in English, e.g. Sex Education, where pupils go to English classes'. A third approach is evidenced as one school teaches PSE wholly through the medium of English from Primary 4.

Figure 7:

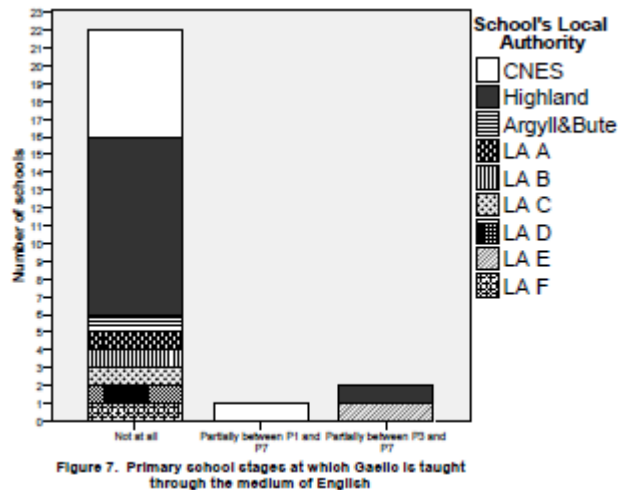


Figure 7 shows that 22 of 25 respondents' schools teach Gaelic through the medium of Gaelic at all primary school levels, with only two schools teaching Gaelic partially through English between P3 and P7 and one school teaching Gaelic partially through English at all primary school stages.

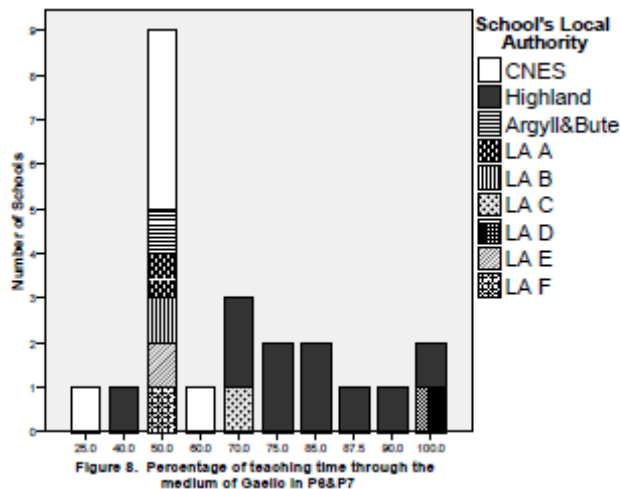
What percentage of teaching time is delivered through the medium of Gaelic at the upper primary stage?

The percentage of teaching time delivered through the medium of Gaelic at the upper primary stage (Primary 6 and Primary 7) is an additional key aspect of variation between respondents' school language models. Figure 8 demonstrates that the percentage of Gaelic-medium instruction varies between 25% and 100% across the sector with the most popular being the 50:50 model (employed by 9 of the 23 respondents to this question).

An examination of the data by Local Authority reveals that whilst Highland employs a strongly Gaelic-medium model of Gaelic-English language learning and teaching in the upper primary stages (with 9 of 10 respondents teaching 70% or more of the Primary Six

and Seven curriculum through the medium of Gaelic), Comhairle nan Eilean Siar typically favours a 50:50 bilingual model (with 4 of 6 respondents employing this at the Upper Primary stage). One caveat must be noted with regard to the data for the school in Local Authority C, as the respondent notes that their unit displays a ‘higher percentage [Gaelic] than usual GME at this stage’ due to a lower than normal percentage of teaching through the medium of Gaelic at earlier primary school stages.

Figure 8:



In summary, the research reveals there to be heterogeneity with regard to the linguistic approaches employed to teach each of the key primary curricular areas amongst the twenty five Gaelic-medium primary providers represented by the respondents to the questionnaire. An overview of the data at national level reveals there to be at least seven distinct linguistic approaches variously employed to teach the Gaelic-medium primary curriculum, namely teaching a curricular area: wholly through Gaelic from Primary 1 to Primary 7; partially in English, partially in Gaelic from Primary 1-7; wholly through Gaelic at the early primary stage, and then partially in English, partially in Gaelic from

Primary 3 or 4 to 7; wholly through Gaelic from Primary 1 to Primary 4, and then partially in English, partially in Gaelic from Primary 5 to 7; wholly through English from Primary 1 to 7; wholly through Gaelic at the early primary stage, and then wholly through English from Primary 3 or 4 to 7; wholly through Gaelic at the early and middle primary school stages, and then wholly through English at the upper primary stage (Primary 6 and 7).

The analysis, at a Local Authority level, of the linguistic approaches employed to teach each key primary curricular area demonstrated the extent of variation of practice within individual local authorities. Such findings arguably reveal the limitations of the current taxonomy of Gaelic-medium education which is based on the policies of key Gaelic-medium providing Local Authorities.

However, data from 27 of the 61 Scottish Gaelic-medium primary education providers is not sufficient to construct a new taxonomy of Gaelic-medium education based on the practice that occurs in Gaelic-medium primary schools. Rather, the construction of such a taxonomy would require the collection and analysis of comprehensive data from every Gaelic-medium primary education provider in Scotland.

Which educational stakeholders would benefit from a new taxonomy of Gaelic-medium education?

A reclassification of the Gaelic-English language models currently employed in Gaelic-medium primary education would potentially benefit many educational stakeholders.

With regard to existing Gaelic-medium provision, a revised taxonomy would enable local authorities who currently provide Gaelic-medium education to view the range of approaches to Gaelic-English language learning and teaching across the sector, and to evaluate the appropriateness of the Gaelic-English language model employed in their context. The classification of Gaelic-medium schools by language model type would enable teachers to identify colleagues from other primary schools who implement a similar language model to their own with whom they could liaise, share good practice and perhaps work collaboratively. A revised taxonomy may also be of benefit to the secondary schools into which Gaelic-medium primary schools feed, as a clear understanding of the nature of Gaelic-medium pupils' linguistic experiences at primary school level³ would enable secondary school staff to respond appropriately to the pupils' linguistic needs at the start of their secondary schooling.

A new taxonomy of Gaelic-English language models would also be of benefit to educational stakeholders who are considering Gaelic-medium education. Local Authorities considering providing Gaelic-medium education would be able to view existing Gaelic-English language models that might usefully be adapted to the council's own geographic and linguistic context through a process of policy 'borrowing,' (Phillips 2000, p. 299) whilst parents considering sending their children to Gaelic-medium education would be able to access up-to-date information concerning both the range of Gaelic-English language models employed within the Gaelic-medium education sector and the specific language model employed by their nearest Gaelic-medium primary education provider. Moreover, a new taxonomy classifying the linguistic nature of

current primary school level Gaelic-medium education provision would raise awareness that Gaelic-medium education is not necessarily, as the term suggests, education completely through the medium of Gaelic, information which may prompt increased parental interest in the sector.

A clearer taxonomy would also inform research and policy concerning Gaelic-medium education. Research into primary level Gaelic education would be more specific if researchers consistently viewed GME as a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous concept and subsequently distinguished between Gaelic-English language models in their research. Research into key issues such as the effectiveness of Gaelic-medium education, the appropriateness and availability of curricular resources, and into the reasons underpinning decisions concerning the extent to which pupils will continue with Gaelic in Secondary school, could be investigated in respect to one type of Gaelic-English language model, or incorporate the type of Gaelic-English language model employed by schools as a variable in the research. Such an approach would result in research findings and recommendations specific to types of language model, advice which could influence the appropriate local authority policy and be implemented in practice at a school level. Thus, a new taxonomy for Gaelic-medium education may ultimately serve to improve the educational experience of the pupil, the key stakeholder in Gaelic-medium primary education.

Considerations in the development of a new taxonomy

If it is accepted that a new taxonomy for Gaelic-medium primary education would be valuable, then it would be useful to look for examples of existing classificatory models of minority language medium primary education in other contexts. An example of such a taxonomy from which Scotland could potentially learn is the ‘descriptive definitions’ system, one of two classificatory options proposed by the Welsh Assembly Government to redefine primary and secondary school level Welsh-language education in Wales in their consultation paper *Defining Schools According to Welsh Medium Provision*, of January, 2006⁴. Such ‘descriptive definitions’ which ‘provide a brief description of primary and secondary schools according to (i) the medium of teaching in each key stage...and (ii) the language/languages of the school outside the curriculum’ (AHA, 2006, p. 5) classify Welsh primary school education into five ‘Primary School Categories’ ranging from ‘Welsh-Medium Primary School’ to ‘Predominantly English Medium’ (ibid., pp. 5-6).

Although Welsh is a compulsory part of the Welsh curriculum for all pupils until the age of 16, and this has bearing on the Welsh taxonomy, current provision in Gaelic-medium and Gaelic learners education in Scotland could be taxonomised by a similar method. However, as this paper is concerned with Gaelic-medium education, the primary focus will be on outlining the more strongly Welsh ‘primary school categories’ and discussing their potential significance for a new taxonomy of the Gaelic-medium education sector.

The Welsh model defines a ‘Welsh-medium Primary School’ as a school in which the Curriculum is ‘taught wholly through the medium of Welsh for early years and Key Stage 1’ and in which ‘Welsh is the main teaching medium at Key Stage 2’⁵. ‘English is

introduced as a subject at Key Stage 2 and is taught through the medium of English, and English is also used for some aspects of some subjects' but 'at least 70% of the teaching at Key Stage 2 is through the medium of Welsh' (ibid., p. 5). The 'Language of the School' in a 'Welsh-medium primary school' is Welsh, which is used for the 'day to day business of the school,' for 'communication with the pupils' and for the 'school's administration.' Parents receive communication from the school 'either in Welsh or in both Welsh and English' (ibid., p. 5). Bòrd na Gàidhlig's draft National Gaelic Education Strategy aims to 'expand provision through dedicated GME [Gaelic-Medium Education] schools' (BnaG, 2006, p. 45) and thus such Category 1 schools may in time become a more prominent feature of the Scottish Gaelic-medium education sector.

The Welsh taxonomy draws a distinction between a 'Welsh-Medium Primary School' and a 'Dual Stream Primary School' (Category 2) in which the 'Welsh-Medium primary' curricular system outlined in Category 1 exists alongside a 'Predominantly English Medium' curricular model (Category 5) in the same school. The 'languages of the school' in a Category 2 Dual Stream Primary School are Welsh and English. (AHA, 2006, p. 5)

Category 2 of the Welsh system ostensibly constitutes the majority of Gaelic-medium provision as the existence of a predominantly English-medium primary stream alongside a corresponding Gaelic-medium stream is typical of the Gaelic-medium primary sector. However, the stringent language related curricular requirements of the Welsh taxonomy in which 'at least 70% of the teaching at Key Stage 2 is through the medium of Welsh' (ibid., p. 5) may not be fulfilled by all Gaelic-medium streams in the Scottish context,

and thus a Scottish taxonomy may either have to reduce such a language requirement to 50% or more, in accordance with the recommendation in the *Gaelic 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines* that ‘Gaelic should be the predominant teaching medium throughout the primary stages’ (SOED, 1993, p. 6), or, alternatively, the second Welsh Primary School Category could be subdivided to better suit the Scottish context.

‘Primary School Category 3’ in the Welsh taxonomy is ‘Predominantly Welsh-medium with significant use of English, in which ‘both languages are used in teaching for early years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, but with greater emphasis on Welsh. Welsh is used as the medium of instruction for between 51% and 70% of the primary curriculum overall’ (AHA, 2006, p. 6). This model is not widely employed in the Welsh context, indeed the Welsh Education Department note that ‘It is possible that the 3rd category does not describe any existing schools, but it has been included for completeness’ (ibid., p. 5), yet the category may prove useful when taxonomising bilingual language models in the Scottish context.

Primary School Categories Four and Five in the Welsh context, namely ‘Predominantly English medium with significant use of Welsh’ and ‘Predominantly English medium’ are not relevant to the classification of Gaelic-medium primary education, as the Celtic-language is used as a medium of instruction for less than 50% of teaching time in these models. However, the existence of a category similar to Category Five – in which Welsh is taught as a second language in Key Stages 1 and 2 and although ‘Some aspects of some subjects may be taught in Welsh...less than 20% of the teaching is through the medium

of Welsh' (ibid., p. 6) - would potentially be valuable if the whole of Gaelic primary education, including the Gaelic Learners in the Primary School Scheme, was being classified.

Another key aspect of the proposed Welsh taxonomy from which Scotland could potentially learn is the incorporation of the 'Language of the School' factor into the system of categorization. The specification of requirements or recommendations regarding the incorporation of the Celtic language into the day-to-day operation of the school in a taxonomy of primary school level Gaelic-English language models is potentially very important as both the language model within the classroom and the language of the school may affect pupil perception of and identification with their Celtic language. Promoting positive perceptions of bilingualism at primary school level is important, as the language attitudes Gaelic-medium pupils form during primary school may influence their language choices at secondary school and beyond.

Endnotes

1. The term language model is here used to refer to the linguistic strategy used to teach the primary curriculum – the proportion of teaching time conducted in Gaelic and in English at each primary level, or the way in which the two languages are used to teach certain curricular areas at different primary stages.
2. The local authorities were Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland, City of Glasgow, City of Aberdeen and City of Edinburgh.

3. For example, with regard to the level of vocabulary pupils will have developed in English and in Gaelic in various curricular areas at primary school.
4. The alternate system proposed in the consultation exercise was ‘definitions based on numeric analysis’ which ‘would define schools according to a formula which quantifies the proportion of teaching through the medium of Welsh and English’ (for details, please see AHA, 2006, pp. 9-14).
5. ‘Early Years’ refers to the education of children between the ages of 3 and 5, and may fall within the remit of a primary school if the school provides nursery and/or a ‘reception’ year for pre-school pupils. Key Stage 1 encompasses Years 1 and 2 of Statutory Primary Education (when pupils are aged 5 to 7.) Key Stage 2 comprises the remaining four years of Primary Schooling, Years 3 to 6 (when pupils are aged 7 to 11).